

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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(Proverbs, No. 11)

SUBJECT: WISDOM IN SPEECH (5 of 6)

TITLE: A WORD FITLY SPOKEN (1 of 2)

TEXT: PROVERBS 25:11-15.

*“Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.
Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.”*

INTRODUCTION. The NKJV reads, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver.” I have always been amazed at people who always seem to say the right thing at the right time. I tend to think of the right thing to say either after someone else has said it, or after it is too late to matter. My younger brother, Mike, is an attorney who loves trial work. He likes to be put in a situation in which he has to think on his feet - he must respond quickly, and in the opinion of some in his profession he does it exceptionally well. My other brother, James, however, is the one who has always seemed to have a quick response, and sometimes it is actually the right response! There have been times though when he made me a little nervous.

When I was a teenager I was teaching a class of “Juniors” that included some rowdy boys. I knew I could not afford to lose control of the class, so I would call them down when they picked at other boys and girls, or when they did anything to distract others. One Sunday, after I had spoken to one of the older boys for about the third time, he said, “Well, if you don’t like what I’m doing I’ll go home.” That was the last thing I wanted, but neither could I let him keep everyone else from getting anything out of the class. I needed to say just the right thing, but before I could respond, I was shocked to hear my little brother, who was probably the youngest boy in the class, say, “Go on home then! We don’t want you in here anyway.” The older boy was somewhat surprised, but he got over it very soon. If I had said the same thing we would have held it against me for months.

James picks at children and teases elderly people - and they love it. If I said the same thing to them someone would throw a net over my head. But I have observed something over the years. My brother is a compassionate person - I am not ashamed to admit that he seems more compassionate than I. This very morning I visited an elderly lady in a local hospital. She said, “Mr. Sanders told me he was going to call you, and he said, ‘he’ll come.’”

The lady had called her son, who is a physician in the New Orleans area, to tell him she had felt some pressure in her chest, but no pain. He told her to go the hospital for an EKG. After the EKG at a branch of the hospital, the doctor told her she had had a heart attack and that they needed to get her to the hospital immediately, and that she couldn’t drive herself. She said, “Oh, yes I can drive, tool. I drove myself here and I will drive myself home. And if I have any trouble my neighbor, Mr.

Sanders, will get me to the hospital.”

When they got to the hospital, James took her to admittance and was immediately told that they would send her for an MRI. She told me that James said, “No, you are not sending her for an MRI. She is not going to sit down there four or five hours before she receives any treatment. You are going to have to get a doctor to see her right now!” They did, and discovered that she had indeed needed immediate attention. As a matter of fact, his “fitting” words may well have saved her life.

I. THE WISDOM OF GOD CANNOT BE COMPARED TO THE WISDOM OF MAN.

A. The Wisdom of Man Is Foolishness Before God (1 Cor. 3:19-20).

1. Divine truth is spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).
2. The wisdom of God is higher than man can attain, (1 Cor. 1:25ff).
3. The wisdom of God is available to all who fear him.

Television has given America certain super-saints who are admired by their followers - and you had better not question their heros of the faith. I well remember the reaction I got when I cautioned certain individuals about Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart. Who was I to question a TV preacher? After there fall brought shame to the church throughout America, not one of those people ever came back and said, “You know, you were right about not sending our tithes to PTL.

I would like to commend Pat Robertson for the many good things he does, for the excellence in communicating the message of salvation as well as his efforts to feed the hungry, and meet other needs of the impoverished. What disturbs me is his “word of knowledge” - which he always seems to get in the right time slot. Day in and day out. “Someone out there has lower back pain,” or, “Someone is having trouble with a knee.” I guarantee you I can stand in a group of fifteen people and announce that I according to a word of knowledge from the Lord, someone in the group has lower back pain, someone would probably say, “Hey, that’s me.” And if no one else could say that, I could say it myself.

The wisdom of God is available to every Christian. How do we receive it? It begins with a reverential fear of God, and grows as we “grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. The Ways of God Are Higher Than the Ways of Man (Isaiah 55:9).

1. The wisdom of God is practical.
2. It always has an ethical quality.

3. It dovetails with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

- a. Wisdom is not synonymous with Sanctification.
- b. Where there no sanctification, there is very little wisdom.
- c. Where there no wisdom, sanctification is hard to prove.

II. GODLY WISDOM WILL FIND A PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

A. Godly Wisdom Rebukes Evil (Proverbs 27:5-6).

“Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”

B. Godly Wisdom Praises God.

C. Godly Wisdom Honors Others .

The wisdom that is from above is a discerning wisdom, an understanding wisdom. It will help us to understand when to rebuke and when to encourage; when to compliment and when to criticize. I happen to believe that beverage alcohol is one of the most serious problems in America today - at least in the sense that it aggravates almost any other problem with which it is associated. When the old-time preachers called it the devil’s brew they nailed it. I signed a commitment card when I was thirteen years old promising the Lord that I would never buy, sell, serve, or consume alcoholic beverages, and I meant it. I had already seen what it could do to individuals, and to families.

I am absolutely convinced that total abstinence is the best answer to the beverage alcohol issue. I have preached against it for year, and my position is uncompromising. However, one day a man with a serious drinking problem came to see me when I was a pastor in Texas. He told me he drank a six pack before he got home after work, another while working around the house, and another while he was watching TV before going to bed. That is a lot of beer, and it was taking a good part of his salary. He was ready for help.

I called Stan and asked him to come to my house to talk with the visitor. Stan was an alcoholic who had been sober for a long time and he offered to take the man to a treatment center. I was a little surprised when Stan asked, “Do you have any beer at home now?” The man told him he had some in the refrigerator. Stan said, “If you want a beer when you get home, go on and drink it, and bring one with you in case you want to drink it on the way.”

I am sure I would have said, “If you are serious about quitting, there is no better time to stop than now.” I have told people that. Stan explained it to me. If he had told our new friend to stop “cold turkey”, he might gone. Stan did not strip the man of his dignity and you could see the feeling of

acceptance in his eyes and hear it in his voice. I have not changed my mind about alcohol but I learned something about people that day.

Let me give you another illustration. I sat with one of our deacons at a convention not too long ago. We watched to leaders on one side of an issue as their expressions changed from involved, to arrogant (to us), to agitated (if not angry). After the results were announced they left the convention center. A layman we met for the first time had told us that the previous year was asked to pass out copies of the president's sermon, and when he noticed these two men head for the exit as Dr. Tommy French was about to begin his President's Address. Not appreciating their attitude, he stepped over and asked if they would like a copy of Dr. French's sermon. One of them said, "No! I am leaving so I won't have to hear that stinking sermon."

After these men left at this convention I stepped out into a foyer and overheard two or three men celebrating the election of their candidate. When someone made a statement about the reaction of these men, I heard Dr. Leon Hyatt pause and ask them to show love for the brethren. I appreciated that. Godly wisdom honors others even when you do not agree with them.

1. Godly wisdom honors your parents (Ex. 20:12).
2. Godly wisdom honors God (Pro. 3:9; 1 Sam. 2:30).
3. Godly wisdom does not honor a fool (Pro. 26:1, 8).
4. Godly Wisdom honors others above self (Rom. 12:10).

D. Godly Wisdom Expresses Righteousness (10:20-21).

E. Godly Wisdom Expresses Courage (Ps. 27:14).

American history will continue to record the exploits of calvary officers like Custer and Sheridan, but to those who have not been denied the privilege of reading, (in Paul Harvey's words) "the rest of the story", there were two calvary commanders whose exploits eclipsed all others in modern history. Those two men were Jeb Stuart and Nathan Bedford Forrest. A British military historian insisted that Nathan Bedford Forrest was the single greatest soldier of the Civil War. Forrest, who had twenty-six (or was it twenty-nine) horses shot out from under him during that bloody war, never became a Christian until after the war. Jeb Stuart was better known because of his theater operation - he was guarding the flanks of General Lee and invading northern territory. Both fought against incredible odds.

On one occasion, toward the end of the war, Jeb Stuart was preparing for a charge by forces several times greater than his. A captain looked to General Stuart for any indication of what he was thinking, and was surprised to see a smile on his face and an expression of peace on his face. Jeb

Stuart answered the question he saw in the captain's eyes: "When you fear God you don't have to fear anything else."

Wouldn't you like to face the trials and challenges of your life with that kind of courage? Well, so would I! And now, I am going to tell you something, and when I do, someone may think I am boasting of my courage, but if you will bear with me, I think I can dispel that thought.

Following my heart attack, I spent several days in ICU before undergoing by-pass surgery. I committed myself to the care of the Lord and the medical team. I had had the kind of heart attack you hear about when someone does not live to get to the hospital - so a nurse told me. I had no fear. I was not worried about dying, debts, rehab, or anything else. I distinctly remember thinking that after what I had been through I should never worry about lesser things again. Guess what? I am not boasting of my courage, I am confessing fear, anxiety, and worry about numerous things, both small and great since that time.

This is not matter of attaining a certain level at which you will never fear again. When you keep your eyes on Jesus you can walk with Him with assurance, but when you take your eyes off Him you are going to sink in a sea of fear and despair, just as surely as Simon Peter sank in the Sea of Galilee.

F. Godly Wisdom Expresses the Truth (12:17, 22b).

Our Lord loves the truth - and He hates a lie. We had better count our blessing in that while God hates lies and He hates lying, he loves liars, and Jesus died for liars, just as He did for all other sinners. The psalmist declared, "I said in my alarm, 'All men are liars'" (Ps. 116:11). I don't want to think of myself as a liar, do you? I have heard quite a few "personal testimonies" in revivals and evangelistic crusades, people confessing all sorts of things - "I did it all before God saved me." However, there are a couple of things that I do not remember people giving their "personal testimony" about. One is hypocrisy - would you really want to confess the hypocrisy in your life? No, we had rather have someone in mind we can identify at "the" hypocrite in our church. The hypocrite is someone else, and so is the liar. But, let's face one thing - as long as you are in this world, you are going to be tempted to compromise the truth, and if you do you are lying.

Now, before you protest that you would never lie, let me concede one point. If I ask you a question about something you did or did not do, I believe most of you would tell me the truth if you say anything at all. But when was the last time someone asked you, "Isn't that the most beautiful baby you have ever seen?" And what did you say while you were thinking, "You ought to see my grandchild"?

My brother James told me he had asked our younger brother about a lawyer who were running for the position of district judge in another area. James told me that Mike said, "If Joe B. (our father) was one hundred on the truth chart, this man would come in at about sixty-five" - which, by the way, placed him close to his opponent. A young man who lived on our farm described something another

young man, a friend and neighbor, had done to try to intimate girls on dates. He would drive around, seemingly without purpose, until he found a secluded place way back out in the hills. There he would threaten to put her out and make her walk home if she was not cooperative. The young man who was telling my father the story, was more than a little impressed with his friend's "approach." When he finished he waited for a response. My father looked up from the tractor he was trying to get back in the field and said, "That's sorry as the devil!"

To which our young friend asked, "Do you mean you think I am as sorry as the devil?" Without missing a step or a breath, Daddy looked him in the eye and answered, Yes." I will have to admit that he used a mild expletive naming the eternal abode of said "devil," but the discussion ended there. My father was scrupulously honest with money, property, or his opinion. He might not offer an opinion, but if he did you never had to wonder if he was telling you what he really thought. You may be thinking that this should true of all Christians, and it should. But I wouldn't be surprised if my father had been that honest before he became a Christian at age twenty-one. He came from that period in our history when "a man's word was his bond," and a handshake settled most any agreement other than a contract on land.

That kind of honesty is good, but there is something better. A Christian should always be honest - but there is a major difference. The Christian knows a truth the lost person cannot comprehend. He "tells the truth in love" for the glory of God. Furthermore, he is used of the Lord to help pull back the veil and reveal divine truth which no lost person can grasp.

My good friend, Bob Moore, decided one summer to move his family an hour away from their home in Nederland, Texas to some property he had bought for his retirement. He explained that both he and his wife wanted to know if they would want to commute to their jobs and they decided on a trial run while their teenaged son and daughter were out of school. He told me that they decided to move their church membership to a local church because it would not be a fair test if they did not have a local church home.

By the end of the summer, they had decided to stay in Nederland, and shared this with people at the small church where they had worshiped all summer. The pastor visited and tried to talk Bob out of moving back. Then, when he saw that they were committed to moving back, the pastor said, "Well, since you are going to be moving back, I would like to ask you a question. I would like to know what you think of my preaching?"

Bob said, "Now, I want you to understand this: if you had not asked me, I would not have said anything. But since you asked, I feel that I should tell you the truth. Frankly, your preaching doesn't appeal to me. I know it does to some people, but it doesn't to me. For the first ten to fifteen minutes you do all right, but then when you have said everything you have prepared to say, you begin to repeat yourself and then you resort to pounding the pulpit and hollering, and that doesn't appeal to me." I made up my mind that Bob was ever going to tell me what he thought about my preaching he was going to have to volunteer it!

Bob felt that this man asked a fair question, and he must have had a reason. He also sought to help him, not to hurt him. It is not always comfortable to tell the truth, even when you tell it in love, but the more you do it the more you will find the Holy Spirit guiding you.

We must also tell the truth when it comes to sound doctrine and ethical issues. We must not go around looking for arguments about security of believers, Halloween, or whether it is a sin to decorate a Christmas tree. But there are issues we must address. Peter wrote, "...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15).

K. Godly Wisdom Seeks Peace (12:20b; 15:1).

L. Godly Wisdom Honors Wisdom (15:1-2).

M. Godly Wisdom Is Wholesome (15:4).

CONCLUSION

INVITATION